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ON PAGE E9

THE WASHINGTON POST
22 October 1980

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'Knuckle-Draggers' at Work for Libya

It is possible the Central Intelligence Agency knew about, perhaps even condoned, the activities of U.S. mercenaries who ran a school for terrorists in an abandoned palace in Libya.

The Americans were trained in undercover work, including the finer points of assassination, by the CIA and U.S. Special Forces. They continued to draw on their contacts in the U.S. intelligence community while they rigged booby traps and taught paramilitary tactics for Libya's reckless, radical ruler Muammar Qaddafi.

He has turned Tripoli into the terrorist capital of the world, a place seething with desperadoes and revolutionaries of every imaginable cause, color and costume. They come to Libya for refuge, money and weapons.

The two headmasters of the terrorist school, Frank Terpil and Edwin Wilson—both former CIA agents, both wanted in the United States on gun-running charges—are familiar figures in Tripoli. Wilson is reported to be hiding out there in a hotel room down the hall from the notorious terrorist and assassin Carlos the Jackal.

There is evidence in top-secret Justice Department files that the CIA may have been aware of the mercenaries' undercover work for Qaddafi. The files, reviewed by my associate Dale Van Atta, disclose that several leads indicated CIA connivance but could not be followed up. The agency cooperated with the investigators on some questions, but stonewalled in-

quiries that threatened to hit too close to home.

"We were getting onto very hot stuff," one investigator said. "It was my clear impression that we had gotten too close to some very secret CIA shenanigans." Here are some of the suspicious leads from the files:

- Two men, who "had been involved in the development and design of Special Forces-type devices," were recruited to work for Qaddafi. According to the files, "They were highly skilled technicians from China Lake, Calif." This is the site in the Mojave Desert of a supersecret Navy center where lethal devices are perfected. Both men were "working on classified CIA concealed weapons systems" when they were hired to impart their expertise to the Libyans. After their stint in Libya, incredibly, they returned to work at China Lake, though the CIA knew of the association with Qaddafi.

- Terpil and Wilson made a startling proposition to three CIA contract agents in September 1976. They were asked to kill a Libyan "traitor" whom Qaddafi wanted eliminated and to train the dictator's own assassins. When Terpil and Wilson cited their CIA credentials, the three men flew to London and Geneva to discuss the deal. They declined a \$100,000-per-year offer after learning that they would be working for Qaddafi and wouldn't have the "protection" of the CIA.

- A retired veteran of the Army Special Forces received a telephone offer of \$50,000 a year to put together a five-man team "with expertise in intelligence operations, weapons and demolition." The offer came from someone he apparently believed was a clandestine U.S. official recalling him to action. Obediently, he recruited four Special Forces men who, by prearrangement, turned over their birth certificates and passports to an unidentified woman at the Arlington Quality Inn. Two hours later, she returned with Libyan visas. Once in Libya, they discovered that their secret mission was to train Qaddafi's security forces. The leader returned to the United States and informed the FBI. Not long afterward, he received an anonymous threat to "forget everything he knew about the operation in Libya or else . . ."

- Another team was recruited by a captain who, according to the files, was "in charge of the hazardous devices division, Redstone Arsenal, Huntsville, Ala."

Many CIA operatives merely have an "understanding" with the agency, but no formal connection to avoid possible embarrassment. Other former specialists in the dark arts, known in intelligence circles as "knuckle-draggers," have been turned loose since the CIA was reformed and may be looking for new employment. In the intelligence game, it's an easy transformation from spook to mercenary.